50th Annual Conference of the Western Field Ornithologists

In Collaboration with Klamath Bird Observatory and the Oregon Birding Association

September 17–20, 2026 • Ashland, Oregon

Frequently Asked Questions

REGISTRATION & PRICING

Q: When does registration open?

A: Conference registration opens May 20th at 9:00am PT. WFO Life and Patron Members have early registration access on May 18th at 9:00am PT. The registration link will be accessible through the conference website at https://westernfieldornithologists.org/conference/

Q: What is the cost to attend?

A: Conference registration is $350 for WFO, KBO, and OBA members. Registration includes field trips, hands-on workshops, full access to science sessions and presentations, welcome reception, and networking events. Additional rates for students, attendees from Mexico, non-members, and one-day passes are listed on the conference website.

Q: Is the Banquet included in registration?

A: The Banquet and Keynote are available as an add-on for $75 per attendee. Guest banquet tickets are available if you would like to attend with friends and family.

Q: What is the cancellation/refund policy?

A: As stated in the conference waiver agreed upon at the time of registration, conference passes, field trips, and event tickets are non-refundable. WFO is a nonprofit organization and has subsidized fees to keep the conference accessible. If you have an extenuating circumstance, you may request a case-by-case review by emailing conference@westernfieldornithologists.org. We encourage you to consider allowing any unused fees to serve as a donation in support of WFO's mission.

Q: How is the conference addressing special accommodations?

A: Please reach out to conference@westernfieldornithologists.org and let us know how we can support your stay.

Q: How much of a profit is WFO making on the conference?

A: WFO aims to break even on the cost of the conference. We have kept prices as accessible as possible and have subsidized registration costs through member organizations to ensure the best experience while covering hosting costs.

CONFERENCE & PROGRAM

Q: What makes the 50th Annual Conference special?

A: This is a milestone event, celebrating 50 years of WFO Annual Conferences. The conference is held in collaboration with the Klamath Bird Observatory and supported by the Oregon Birding Association. Special features include a Banquet and Keynote by Jaime Stephens, Director of Conservation at KBO, as well as signature events like the Sound ID Challenge with Nathan Pieplow and Ben Guo and Photo ID Panel with Ed Harper.

Q: Where is the conference being held?

A: All programming is centered at the Ashland Hills Hotel & Suites, 2525 Ashland St, Ashland, OR 97520. Field trips will depart for surrounding habitats across southern Oregon and northern California.

Q: What does the conference program include?

A: The program includes expert-led field trips to diverse habitats, science sessions showcasing current regional research, hands-on workshops to sharpen field identification and skills, evening events (Sound ID Challenge, Photo ID Panel, welcome reception, Banquet and Keynote), and ample time for community and connection with fellow field ornithologists.

Q: What are the science sessions, and why should I attend?

A: The science sessions are an annual highlight of WFO conferences, featuring presentations on current ornithological research from across western North America. Talks are typically grouped by theme, such as breeding ecology, water management, or migration, and include contributions from research and travel grant winners. Sessions are welcoming to birders of all experience levels and provide an opportunity to stay current on avian research, reconnect with colleagues, and participate in the conference without requiring strenuous field activity.

Q: What evening events are planned?

A: Evening highlights include the Sound ID Challenge with Nathan Pieplow and Ben Guo, the Photo ID Panel with Ed Harper, a welcome reception, and the 50th Banquet and Keynote. Details on timing will be posted in the conference schedule.

FIELD TRIPS

Q: What kinds of field trips are planned?

A: Expect a mix of half-day and full-day trips to a variety of southern Oregon and northern California habitats — wetlands, oak woodlands, mixed conifer forests, and more — all at the peak of fall migration. The full field trip list and schedule is posted on the conference website.

Q: Is transportation provided for field trips?

A: Transportation is not provided by the conference. All field trips operate via carpooling. Trip leaders will coordinate carpooling for each outing. If you plan to drive, please ensure you have adequate fuel. Riders are encouraged to contribute gas money to drivers (a suggested rate of $0.72 per mile divided by all passengers is a common practice).

Q: How should I prepare for field trips?

A: Review the field trip descriptions on the conference website, which will include information on driving distances, restroom availability, and any required fees or passes. Bring water, snacks, comfortable walking shoes, and weather-appropriate layers. Check the weather forecast a few days before your trip. Binoculars, a field guide, and a notebook are always good companions.

Q: How do I know what birds I might see on a trip?

A: Field trip descriptions list target bird species. Many trip locations are also eBird hotspots, so you can explore species lists for those locations in advance by visiting ebird.org.

Q: Can I use eBird on field trips?

A: Yes! Leaders may be tracking the group's sightings on eBird but we welcome you to do the same. There will be a master tracking list at the conference hotel where you can populate the sightings from your trip. Previously, WFO has tracked around 450 sightings at our conference.

Q: Can I use playback on field trips?

A: It depends on the specific trip. Leaders will indicate whether playback will be used, may be used, or is not permitted. Check with your trip leader if you have questions.

HOTEL & LOGISTICS

Q: Can I book my hotel now?

A: Yes! Reserve your room at the Ashland Hills Hotel & Suites now using the WFO group link to secure the $164/night group rate. Visit: be.synxis.com/?hotel=40192&group=WESTERNFIELD&arrive=2026-09-16&depart=2026-09-20.

Rooms will fill quickly for this special anniversary gathering — book early.

Q: What if I have dietary restrictions or special needs?

A: Please note any dietary restrictions or accessibility needs during registration. The hotel's Luna Café offers diverse menu options including vegetarian selections. Conference organizers will do their best to accommodate all participants. Contact conference@westernfieldornithologists.org with specific concerns.

Q: Are there nearby airports?

A: Yes. The primary airport is Rogue Valley International – Medford Airport (MFR), located approximately 15–18 miles from Ashland (roughly a 20–25 minute drive). MFR is served by Alaska, Allegiant, American, Delta, United, and United Express. Uber, Lyft, taxis, and shuttle services are available from the airport.

Q: Is the conference pet-friendly?

A: The Ashland Hills Hotel & Suites is pet-friendly and has an on-site dog park. However, pets are **not** permitted on conference field trips or in conference programming spaces. Contact the hotel directly regarding their specific pet policies and any applicable fees.

MEMBERSHIP & VOLUNTEERING

Q: Do I need to be a WFO member to register?

A: Membership in WFO, KBO, or OBA qualifies you for the conference member rate of $350. Discounted rates are available for students at $75. Visit westernfieldornithologists.org/conference/ for information on registering.

Q: Can I volunteer at the conference?

A: Yes! Volunteers are always welcome. From leading field trips to general logistics, there are many ways to get involved. Email conference@westernfieldornithologists.org to share how you'd like to help. No prior experience is necessary for many volunteer roles.

Have a question not answered here? Email us at conference@westernfieldornithologists.org